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In distance education to date, the nature of teaching and learning in all academic domains has largely been understood in terms of behaviorist theories, more recently drawing on cognitive science from which principles and models for course design have been derived. This paper takes as its starting point contemporary critiques of such 'traditional' approaches, and argues that these approaches have failed to engage with the concerns and practices of distance educators in the Humanities. A potentially more fruitful approach to the teaching and learning of the Humanities is proposed, derived from linguistic and sociological theories of discourse. On this view, study at undergraduate level is understood as entry into distinctive forms of academic discourse. Some implications for the design of Humanities courses are explored, including course aims and structure; study context; intermediate discourse; the processes of reading, speaking, and writing; and course evaluation. (Contains 23 references.) (Author/GLR)

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THE ROLE OF THEORIES OF DISCOURSE IN COURSE DESIGN FOR HUMANITIES DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In distance education to date, the nature of teaching and learning in all academic domains has largely been understood in terms of behaviourist theories, more recently drawing on cognitive science, from which principles and models for course design have been derived. This paper takes as its starting point contemporary critiques of such 'traditional' approaches and, in particular, argues that they have failed to engage with the concerns and practices of distance educators in the Humanities. A potentially more fruitful approach to the teaching and learning of the Humanities is proposed, derived from linguistic and sociological theories of discourse. On this view, study at undergraduate level is understood as entry into distinctive forms of academic discourse. Some implications for the design of Humanities courses are explored. The paper draws on the author's academic background in the Humanities and many years spent working with colleagues in the Arts Faculty at the Open University, as a course designer and pedagogical adviser.

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Studying the Humanities

Study of the Humanities involves analysis and interpretation of the activities, ideas, beliefs, cultural practices and products of individuals and groups within a society, over time. It is a distinctive mode of learning which, as we will see, is not adequately represented by quantitative input-output models of pedagogy. In order to understand what is involved in teaching and learning in this domain, some account of its nature and core study processes is required.

For present purposes the Humanities comprise the (interdisciplinary) field of cultural studies; literary, religious and classical studies; the study of philosophy and history; and the histories of art and music. What might be said to unite these subjects is that the objects of study are 'texts' – albeit of many different kinds (literary, historical, pictorial and/or auditory, philosophical, symbolic) and drawn from different historical periods -- texts which stand in need of analysis and interpretation. While the two processes, of analysis and interpretation, are complementary, they are not identical. Since they are fundamental to study within this domain we must understand what each entails.

Textual *analysis* is a quasi-technical process involving knowledge of the 'rules' governing the composition of different text-genres, their subject-matters and forms (literary genres such as poems, plays and novels, for example; historical sources such as government or ecclesiastical documents, and diaries; still-life and landscape paintings; the musical forms of oratorio and sonata). Analysis involves such knowledge because, as ever, 'meaning' depends on an understanding of form.

For example, when we perceive a poem as in certain respects different to an historical document, we are able to conceive of it as 'a thing' (specifically, as 'this sort of thing', as opposed to that). We have made an abstraction, and can be said to have acquired the concept 'poem'. But differentiation depends on recognising similarities as well as differences. Poems and novels are both classed as forms of Literature, because they use language in 'literary' ways: that they do so differently, and to rather different ends, enables us to distinguish between them. Through such processes of analysis -- of discrimination, or recognising variation, and unification, or recognising central tendencies -- we begin to impose some meaningful order on aspects of our cultural experience and to know more about them.

Further, on repeated exposure to poems (or, through a number of analogous experiences), we are able to differentiate between types of poem -- noting differences between what we call lyric and epic poems, for example, and what it is that lyric poems share. Similarly, within the landscape genre of painting certain sub-genres have been identified, such as marine painting, woodland scenes and townscapes. Particular analytical concepts and modes have developed in relation to the different text-genres we identify. In analysis of poems for instance, we have identified particular (patterned) uses of language, involving concepts such as alliteration, metaphor and rhythm. Within art history, analysis of the landscape genre of paintings focuses attention on problems to do with

representing distance and light and shade, involving analytical concepts such as perspective, mass, and colour density.

Within the Humanities, then, the various text-genres are analysed in different ways. But all such analysis is conducted in the context of our knowledge and understanding of a text's different social uses over time -- for instance, our knowledge that a sixteenth-century religious painting, which we see in a modern art gallery, was actually produced to be hung in a large, ill-lit church for consumption by the faithful during worship. Given such circumstances of production, among other things in the painting, we would hardly expect to find great attention paid to detail.

Analytical processes are fundamental to *interpretation* of a text, in which this historical dimension is foregrounded (that is, understanding the issues of production and reception of the text which surround its different social uses over time). All poems, for instance, are written by people who were born at particular times, into particular positions in certain societies, whose ideas, beliefs and purposes took shape in history. They are read not only by people like themselves but also by those born in other places and within other social and historical circumstances, whose conceptions and purposes are different. Interpretation requires knowledge about the socio-historical circumstances of a text's inception and reception, and about the interplay of these contexts in which meaning is made.

In addition, what the text might mean involves consideration of its status, both at the time of its production and for us, here and now. We must ask why it was thought to be of value, and is still significant, or not. This requires not only the knowledge and understanding gained through processes of analysis and interpretation, but also acts of appraisal and *judgement*. It involves "questioning the values proffered by the texts we study". (Scholes, 1985, p.14). Notoriously, processes of interpretation and judgement are contentious; subject to theories about why and how we do them -- theories which themselves change over time, and form part of the contexts that have to be understood.

In literary studies, such inter-connected processes (of analysis-interpretation-judgement, or, 'reading') are what is meant by literary criticism: similar processes produce art- and music-historical criticism; the explanation of historical and religious events and movements, and judgements concerning their significance; the soundness and worth of a philosophical argument. Each discipline that has developed within the domain of the Humanities has, more or less distinctive, purposes, objects of study, text-genres, central concepts and networks of ideas, methods of enquiry, uses of evidence, and tests for 'truth'. When studying these subjects, as teachers and students, we acquire knowledge and seek understanding of all these kinds. We learn to make theoretically informed, appropriate interpretations and judgements by studying the primary and secondary texts produced by our predecessors, by making our own enquiries and producing our own texts. In other words, significant knowledge in this domain is socially constructed, through our language, our discourse, past and present. These, discursive, processes are central to study in the Humanities.

'Traditional' course design in distance education

This brief account of the nature of the Humanities has many implications for teaching and learning. In particular, if textual analysis, interpretation and judgement are the dynamic processes which drive the Humanities themselves, it follows that students must learn them; that studying the Humanities means doing them, in this sense. It implies that these processes should figure prominently in our understanding of how to teach the Humanities. Yet here (as elsewhere in distance education) our practice has been dominated by a behaviourist pedagogy, or by models of teaching and learning derived from the cognitive sciences, which, arguably, are inimical to them.

In these models, guiding principles such as the need to quantify students' learning gains by first identifying what is to be learned, then controlling and graduating the learning input and, subsequently, measuring the outcomes, have been translated into stages governing course design. Nowadays the stages include: identifying learner characteristics; specifying learning objectives or performance indicators; ascribing what is to be learned to hierarchies or incremental stages; identifying what are thought to be effective means to these ends, taking account of learners' cognitive styles (teaching methods, including the use of activities, exercises and project work, and different media); verifying the process by objective empirical investigation; feeding the data back into the design of the course, and improving it. In distance education institutions this approach is often promulgated by instructional designers (also known as educational technologists or pedagogical advisers), who work with teams of subject experts towards the design, production and evaluation of courses for undergraduate and other students.

In focussing here on Humanities education, we leave open the question of whether such an approach is appropriate and helpful to course design in other domains. As regards the Humanities, subject experts have largely resisted instructional designers' attempts to construct distance-taught courses on the basis of such 'scientific' principles, whether actively or passively. Active resistance calls into question the principles underlying the approach, and challenges instructional designers' legitimacy and expertise. Consequently, instructional designers may find their role marginalised, or themselves excluded from the course design process. Passive resistance may give rise to a situation in which lip-service is paid to the prevailing orthodoxy -- for example subject experts may agree to a number of objectives for a course, which supposedly identify learning outcomes and act as a guide to course design -- though the course is in fact designed on the basis of quite other principles.

One response to subject experts' rejection of a scientific approach is to organise our institutions in ways that make it the only one possible: for instance, by employing instructional designers whose job is to brief outside subject experts, employed on a contractual basis, and then to transform the material they produce into an acceptable form. This has the effect of rationalising processes of course design and making them more a matter of bureaucratic routine.

However, the response made here is to deduce that the approach itself must be flawed, or inappropriate in the context of Humanities education, and to take a critical look at it.

Criticism of the application of scientific principles to education in general has a long history and is identified with a variety of alternative positions. For example, Standish (1991) posits two distinct sources: the *learner-centred* camp, represented by such as Ivan Illich and A.S.Neill, who see education as a process of discovery "at the heart of which the learner will play an essential part in determining direction"(p.172); and educational philosophers such as P.H. Hirst and Robin Barrow who, speaking from within the *liberal tradition* accuse it of conceptual confusion and reductionism (that is, of equating behaviour with mind). As a result its proponents are said to have "misunderstood the nature of knowledge by reducing it to mere information and then attempt(ed) to teach the diverse standards inherent in the various subjects in a contextual vacuum". (Kazepides, 1989, p.58, cited in Standish, p.173)

Webb (1991) identifies two "frameworks for the exegesis of educational undertakings" which are antagonistic to positivism: *frameworks for understanding*, in which "the single, unproblematic 'reality' of the positivist is replaced by multiple mind-constructed realities" (p.122) and which involve the application of hermeneutic principles (as exemplified in recent times by Marton et al, 1984); and *critical theory*, which depends on structuralist explanations of social relations and is centrally concerned with the "development of people in accordance with rational, democratic and emancipatory values". (Webb, p.124) Here, contemporary critiques from within distance education itself include those made by Evans and Nation (1989) and Harris (1987).

At one time or another the alternative positions identified above, alone or in a variety of constellations, have been seen as offering a more appropriate way of conceptualising processes of teaching and learning in the Humanities, and of guiding the design of Humanities courses. Yet, as Standish points out, valuable though these criticisms and alternative conceptions have been, "they seem like a sword to the head of the Hydra: behavioural objectives are chopped to be replaced by competence statements, by learning outcomes, by skills, and so on...". "What can explain the continuing power which the instrumentalist-behaviourist approach exerts?", he asks. (p.173)

Following a lengthy, and fascinating, analysis of the language of traditional curriculum design, Standish answers his own question, as follows:

> The language of curriculum design operates as a means for speaking uniformly about the various practices which make up a curriculum. The language which is found in a subject – the language which constitutes it – is not the same as that found in the curriculum planner's rationale for that subject. The diversity of languages found in the various subjects is not reflected by a diversity in the language of planning. But the shift from the constitutive language to the methodological language is presumed to be unproblematic: the very nature of subjects and the essential differences between them are thus obscured and misunderstood. This is akin to the mistake of regarding language as a neutral and unproblematic medium. *It raises the question whether there can be a common language for curriculum design.* (p.181, italics added)

On that view, whatever the alternative theoretical framework which might guide curriculum planning (whether learner-centred, liberal/rational, interpretive-understanding, or critical), the principles derived from it cannot simply be applied to any and all fields of knowledge or enquiry. Our focus shifts towards examination of the languages and practices that constitute those fields of knowledge themselves; towards some negotiation between our guiding framework(s) and *what* it is we are trying to teach, from which we may derive principles for the construction of distance-taught courses. On this view the crucial question is; how might we bring methodological discourse into more fruitful relationship with the languages and practices that constitute the various fields of human enquiry?

As regards the Humanities, our account of what is involved in studying them might suggest that scientific principles of course design have made very little headway within this domain because they cannot accommodate the abstract, complex (mental) discriminations, and the richly dynamic relationships between processes of analysis-interpretation-judgement that are at its heart. We may conclude that an approach which emphasises quantifiability, observable behavioural outcomes, efficiency, and containment, simply misses the point. It constitutes "the application of 'scientific'...principles and procedures in dealing with questions which fall outside the scope of science as commonly understood". (Standish, 1991, p.171) While the sciences might be said to ask 'how to know truth?', the arts pose the question 'how may we endow experience with meaning?' (Bruner, 1986, Chapter 2)

It remains to be seen how our methodological language might more fruitfully engage with the languages and practices that constitute the Humanities, and what principles might provide meaningful directions for the design of distance-taught courses in this domain.

Theories of discourse

Following from the earlier account of the nature the Humanities, studying these disciplines (as a student within conventional or distance education) means coming to understand the distinctive purposes, objects of study and text-genres that characterise the discipline in question; its methods of enquiry; the central concepts and networks of ideas involved; its characteristic modes of expression; its uses of evidence, and tests for truth. Students do so by entering into processes of textual analysis, interpretation and judgement, and by learning to think, speak and write within the academic conventions that apply. In the process, they come under the sway of the values and beliefs that are enshrined in it, but they must also understand all these things as conventional and open to challenge. In so doing they might be said to become participants in certain traditions of academic discourse.

A *discourse* is a particular way of using language, and other symbolic forms (pictures, musical notation, gestures), communicatively: that is, in ways which

produce meaning and understanding. In this (linguistic) context, the term refers to extended pieces of spoken or written language, and it emphasises:

> ...interaction between speaker and addressee or between writer and reader, and therefore processes of producing and interpreting speech and writing, as well as the situational context of language use... 'discourse' is also used for different types of language used in different sorts of social situation (e.g. ...'advertising discourse', 'classroom discourse', 'the discourse of medical consultations'). (Fairclough, 1992, p.3)

On this view, language is "not only a part of experience, but intimately involved in the manner in which we construct and organise experience...a 'social semiotic', and...a resource for meaning." (Halliday, 1985, Foreword, p.vi)

Further, 'discourse' is used to refer to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. (Macdonell, 1986) Thus "the discourse of 'medical science' is currently the dominant one in the practice of health care, though it contrasts with various wholistic 'alternative' discourses (e.g. those of homeopathy and acupuncture) as well as popular 'folk' discourses". (Fairclough, p.3) In this (sociological) sense discourses "do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them; different discourses constitute key entities (be they 'mental illness', citizenship' or 'literacy') in different ways, and position people in different ways as social subjects (e.g. as doctors or patients)..." (p.4)

Some analysis of short extracts from an introduction to the study of Philosophy illustrates the dimensions and some of the possibilities of this mode of analysis. Extracts are taken from E. R. Emmet (1964) Learning to Philosophise.

The passage for analysis begins with this statement:

> Too often Philosophy tends to be regarded as a remote and abstruse subject which can only profitably be studied by the brilliant few. (Preface)

Philosophers are then compared to scientists, and characterised as follows:

> ...their activity is likely to be mental rather than physical and this activity is likely to arise, not from a practical need to answer certain questions...but from a natural curiosity which requires for its indulgence a measure of freedom from practical pre-occupations.

The passage ends:

> It would be a misleading over-simplification, however, to identify science with investigation or going and seeing, and philosophy with speculation or sitting and thinking. (Introduction, p.12)

The opening sentence signals the writer's intention to reassure the student-reader ("too often" Philosophy is regarded in this way but, we infer, not here). However, the next extract opens up the possibility of doubt: is mental activity better than physical activity, natural curiosity better than practical pre-occupation, then?; am I likely to be the kind person who has this 'natural' curiosity he talks about?; even if I am, do I have the measure of freedom that is required to indulge it? The final sentence confirms us in our doubt: by 'misunderstanding' (what appeared to be) the burden of the message, we have

been painting for ourselves a misleadingly over-simple picture -- as the author-philosopher knew all along. We can now see just how foolish we are?

What seems to be going on here is that I, as reader and would-be philosopher, am being constructed in such a way (fearful, inadequate) that I am painted right out of the picture. That would seem to apply to any reader who is not leisured and suitably 'naturally' endowed, and who does not enjoy being tricked into feeling overly simple -- or, at least, fails to admire the rhetorical manoeuvre involved in this passage. Moreover, to be in the picture readers would need to feel comfortable with the lofty tone and mannered style of the discourse: "their activity/likely to be", balanced by "this activity/likely to arise", followed by "not from...but from...which...", together with the resounding phrases with which that paragraph ends and, subsequently, the detached manner in which we find ourselves admonished ("It would be a misleading over-simplification...").

In this passage the reader is not addressed directly. The discourse is characterised by the use of passive verb forms ('be regarded', 'be studied'), and by nominalisation, whereby processes (such as 'being curious') are transformed into things ('a...curiosity') -- discursive practices found in much academic writing, which tend towards abstraction and mystification. Indeed, there is very little sense of agency here at all; of either of the 'key entities' (philosopher or student) purposefully setting out to do certain things. Far from being included in the philosophical enterprise, it is clear that the student-reader is being instructed in it by an expert speaker; moreover, a speaker who adopts such a distant stance that he does not even refer to his own membership of the expert group in a direct way (philosophers are 'they', rather than 'we'). This is a situation in which all the power is with the speaker-teacher: as we have seen, it induces feelings of inadequacy in would-be students.

In short, this is a discourse of exclusion. Your average student knows perfectly well that she does not belong to this club; that she is not the 'natural custodian' of a culture such as that evoked here. She recognises that after all Philosophy <u>is</u> to be regarded as "a remote and abstruse subject which can only be profitably studied by the brilliant few" -- a recognition the author invokes while, apparently, attempting to distance himself from it. In so doing he helps sustain potent myths regarding the extreme difficulty of philosophy as a subject for study, in the wider culture within which students' preconceptions are formed. We may conclude that, if many people are prejudiced against Philosophy (a complaint philosophers make that has a long history), philosophers themselves might examine the question of their contribution to such myth-making.

This short piece of discourse analysis illustrates that any discursive event is, simultaneously, a text or product, a discursive practice, and a social practice. As *text or product* it is amenable to description and linguistic analysis, by genre and style. We began with a description of the structure of this passage of academic prose, and noticed the distancing effects of the language used (passive verb

forms, elaborate sentence construction, lofty tone, etc.), which tended to exclude and mystify. In effect, the writing 'positioned' the reader as inadequate.

This seems even more puzzling when we consider the event as *discursive practice*: that is, when we analyse the processes of the text's production, distribution and reception. The text was written by an academic philosopher for beginning philosophy students and, as such, it appears in the recommended reading lists distributed by university departments of Philosophy. This is so even though the book was published in 1964. It has been reprinted at least six times since then, which attests to its popularity: it is a Penguin publication, readily available and fairly cheap. So it is also likely to be read by people who are not committed to studying philosophy, but are just browsing or thinking about it. In this context, a highly academic style of writing seems particularly inappropriate (though it might be quite acceptable among peers).

However, things become clearer when we consider the event as *social practice*: that is, when we take account of the social circumstances in which it takes place, which includes prevailing systems of value. We may take our lead from the opening sentence of the passage, in which the author recognises that the view of philosophy as profitable only to the "brilliant few" is one which is widely held in Western culture. In relation to this, Huber (1990) has proposed that "knowledge claims are at the same time status claims", and that, in order to maintain their positions, academics have stressed "the distance of their position and the difference of their field (from others)." He argues that the real 'priests of academia' are found "always in the theoretically more ambitious, economically less profitable subjects" (p.249) -- such as Philosophy.

We can now place within this broader, evaluative framework both the exclusive tendencies which emerged from linguistic analysis of the passage, and the author's equivocal stance in relation to the reader, and so reach a more satisfying interpretation of its meaning. That is, in the passage the author actually affirms, while seeming to deny, traditional claims regarding the superior nature and status of Philosophy among academic disciplines. It would seem that many contemporary academic philosophers wish to support such a view.

As a result of the analysis, we can see that discourse is a 'mode of action' -- "one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other" -- as well as a 'mode of representation'. (Fairclough, p.63) It is a part of the world we live in, as well as presenting accounts and images of it.

Discourse and the Humanities

As we saw earlier, the objects of the Humanities are texts of different kinds -- representations, accounts and images of reality, of human experience and imagination. Simultaneously, they act upon the world and other people. These texts may be regarded as products, as discursive practices, and as social practices: they stand in need of analysis, by genre and style; of interpretation, in terms of their different social uses over time (involving knowledge about the conditions

of their production, distribution and reception); and of evaluation, in the context of different value positions and theoretical standpoints from which such judgements might be made. In short, we may say that the Humanities are constituted by different, though overlapping, networks of discourse; and that these discourses are dynamic in nature, and relatively indeterminate.

Among other things, this means that the way human experience is mediated through Humanities disciplines -- the ways in which we slice up aspects of it in order to organise and make sense of it -- is conventional, and always open to negotiation and change (witness the breaking down of discipline barriers involved in the formation of the new field of cultural studies). Conceiving of 'Literature' as a discourse, for example, has enabled us to break through its traditional, canonical bounds to analyse and discuss all sorts of 'literary' uses of language, whether found in advertisements, Pope, or pop lyrics.

So, both *what* we know and the *ways* in which we know change over time. Moreover, they tend to change most dramatically not through a process of evolution but because people working within the various disciplines at different times see things differently and challenge the meanings each other makes. Rival discourses (different ways of being, thinking, speaking, writing) exist within each discipline, struggling for ascendancy, though all participants may be united in their adherence to the rigourous processes of analysis and interpretation that are enshrined in it. Within 'literature', for example, feminist discourse has constituted 'gender' as a key entity, and drawn our attention to the way women are 'positioned' as fictional characters, readers and writers.

It should now be apparent what was meant earlier, by saying that significant knowledge in this domain is socially constructed, through our discourse, past and present. For if this account is correct, the 'language' of theories of discourse coincides with the languages and practices which constitute the Humanities themselves: we have here a way of talking about Humanities education -- a methodological language -- which subject specialists themselves understand and can use. And it follows from this that the educator's prime 'practice' is to induct students into one or more Humanities discourse as a participant; teaching them to think, read, speak and write within the conventions that apply, while recognising all these things as conventional.

Implications for course design in Humanities distance education

Many implications flow from this proposition, some of which are briefly discussed here.

1. Course Aims, and Structure

In view of the forgoing analysis, the overarching aims of any course in the Humanities must be to offer students the opportunity to:

- learn to read a range of text-genres appropriately, and engage in related processes of textual analysis, interpretation and judgement;

- engage with the concepts and networks of ideas that characterise the discourse in question, and learn to think in terms of them;
- grasp the purposes and assumptions that underlie current debates within the discourse, as well as the systems of belief and value which inform them;
- understand the way arguments are constructed within the discourse, what counts as evidence and how it is used;
- learn to speak and write within the conventions that apply.

When such aims are applied to a specific subject matter at a particular level of study, they provide guidance for course developers as they begin preparation of a distance-taught course. For example, the aims of a six-week 'block' of the OU *Arts Foundation Course* are:

1. to develop your understanding of the various meanings of 'culture';
2. to take further your introduction to the various forms of Victorian culture and, in particular, to introduce you to a range of cultural artefacts, institutions and activities, including trade-union imagery, music hall, operetta, poetry, painting and symphonic music;
3. to introduce a method of analysis which lays stress on the production, consumption and status of culture, and suggests the relationship of cultural artefacts to dominant and alternative ideologies;
4. to enable you to discuss in an informed way the application of this analysis to different cultural areas...; and thus
5. to develop your study of the interrelationship between culture and society.

(Walder, 1986)

From these aims teachers may derive *key questions* in relation to each part of the block, such as these governing a week's work on the 1852 Royal Academy (art) Exhibition.

1. How was the exhibition structured and organised?
2. How was the exhibition reviewed, and how did critical reactions help to establish and/or consolidate certain 'readings' or interpretations of the pictures discussed?
3. How does a study of the exhibition as a whole inform our understanding of the Pre-Raphaelite works in the show? (Perry, 1986)

These questions enabled the teacher to make selections from among all the material available to her, and to choose appropriate teaching media. A major advantage of posing *questions* is that they imply answers: by considering what is needed to supply 'the answers', or to enable students to supply them, the writer sets out with particular purposes in mind and knows in advance what direction the teaching text should take. Along the way, she has a yardstick against which to measure the importance and relevance of a variety of possible items of information, illustrations, documents, and so forth. And, having posed particular questions, she is more likely to arrive at some satisfactory resolution of the issues, which may be summarised in conclusion. Key questions, then, provide a *structure* for the teaching text.

It is helpful if students are apprised of course aims, even at the outset (in a Course Guide or similar publication), provided that the aims are explained in terms which may be understood at that stage and with reference to the structure of the course and the subject-matter in question. (Chambers and Marwick, 1993) Given the dynamic and indeterminate nature of Humanities discourses, it is not appropriate to present such aims as 'behavioural outcomes' of study. It is most

important that students know what the key questions are, in relation to every unit of study, since they act as structuring devices for students as well as course writers.

2. Study Context

If in distance-taught courses teachers are understood to be constructing one version, among many possible versions of things for students to understand, and if understanding itself is seen as an active 'making of meaning', then *starting points* are of the first importance. Students approach their studies with impressions and pre-conceptions of subject-matters, largely derived from past experience of schooling and from the wider culture (what is 'literature', even what is 'good' literature; only geniuses can study philosophy successfully). They also have ideas about what will be involved in studying the subject and, in some cases, a good deal of knowledge about it. (Chambers and Tunnicliffe, 1992). That is, they *share* certain understandings, by virtue of their membership of a cultural and linguistic group, and they already participate in 'everyday discourses' about a wide range of social, political, ethical and cultural issues, often stimulated by films, television and newspapers.

On this view, 'starting from where the student is' may be understood as a (cultural) process of engaging with students' shared assumptions and knowledge, rather than as a matter of identifying each individual's existing knowledge and (psychological) preparedness for study. Initially, the teacher's task is to provide a *context* for study: to begin to introduce the new, academic, discourse in ways that enable students to make sense of it from the start. This suggests that course designers need to know as much as possible about students' educational and social backgrounds, particularly regarding their membership of sub-cultural and minority language groups.

An Appendix to this paper contains extracts from a distance teaching text, a unit of study for beginning students at the UK Open University (Northedge, 1986). In it, you will see that the author introduces beginning students to the concept of early socialisation. He does so by recognising that the students have all experienced such processes themselves as children, and perhaps also in the role of parent. In extract 2. he asks them to complete an exercise (adults' responses to children leaving the park under protest) which draws on those experiences; focussing their minds on relevant memories and ideas at the outset, and bringing them into play. Later, it becomes apparent that each response is associated with a particular school within Psychology. As a result of doing the exercise, the students have some concrete 'content' to think about while studying the later, more abstract, accounts of the features of each school. And the teacher is able to refer back to these concrete instances at appropriate points throughout. Case-study material presented on audio or video-tape may also fulfil these functions.

In ways such as this it is possible to take beginning students towards a relatively sophisticated understanding of a powerful set of ideas in a short time, as represented in extract 4 (the chart), one of two charts which summarise one week's study. The success of this teaching text is based on the way it *engages*

students, through an interesting exercise, and *gets them thinking* along certain lines from the start. It does not matter that some students will not have had actual experience as a parent or temporary guardian, because they will still have views, often strongly held, about how children should be treated in such situations. Ultimately, the (very sophisticated) point is that in this kind of academic study they are not being asked to pass moral judgement on people's behaviour -- the point of much 'everyday discourse' about such issues -- but to find ways of explaining and understanding it within the terms of a more specialised discourse.

3. 'Intermediate' discourse

As we have seen, teachers should aim to draw on students' shared experience in order gradually to enable them to bring their everyday understandings and discourse into closer relationship with the terms and ideas of the academic discourse to which they seek introduction. In the early stages the main difficulty involved is that, "Utterances derive their meaning from the framework of assumptions and debates within the discourse from which they arise. Thus to understand an utterance (whether spoken or in print), one needs a grasp of the frame-of-reference. However, as a beginner, one does not know the frames-of-reference within the expert discourse and it very difficult to grasp them without listening to some utterances. But, since you cannot yet make sense of utterances, you have a chicken-egg problem -- which comes first?" (Northedge, 1992, p.93)

The author describes the process, in the classroom, whereby a teacher launches a discussion based on familiar discourses, within which frames of reference *are* understood, then, while maintaining a strand of meaning, gradually shifts the terms of discussion to include elements of the academic discourse -- until, eventually, students find themselves participating in a debate conducted within a frame-of-reference drawn from that academic discourse. "In this way the students begin to sense the nature of the unfamiliar frame-of-reference and pick up clues as to how utterances work within it. As they discuss, they share in maintaining the frame-of-reference with the tutor and the other students. To begin with they will not be able to sustain that frame on their own...as they move ahead...they will need to construct rather makeshift frames-of-reference for themselves. Gradually they will be able to adjust and elaborate these until they approximate those of the debates in lectures and academic texts." (p.94)

Within distance education the challenge is to find ways of approximating these teaching/learning processes themselves, by preparing teaching texts which provide sufficient structure and direction for students' thought processes, and which direct their activities to appropriate ends. To begin with, it involves constructing for students an *intermediate discourse*, defined as "a cut-down and simplified version of the discourse (as opposed to throwing them in at the deep end, with a standard text which employs the full-blown discourse)...Although this is not a satisfactory version of the discourse for debates between academics, it is intended to have the *form* and *structure* of the full-fledged discourse thereby providing a staging post along the way". (p.95) In it, the range of terms in play is restricted, abstractions are few and are grounded in concrete examples, and reference to many of the 'names' and theories that would customarily be incorporated is deliberately excluded. It also involves continually supplying

strands of meaning which connect back to everyday discourses, regularly making use of everyday examples and, as we saw, including activities which invite students to make connections between their own experience and the discussion in-text.

Such a view suggests that introduction to an academic discourse must be taken steadily. If we want students to spend time thinking about what they are reading, and going back over things in order to make sense of them in these ways, then there are implications for the amount of ground we can expect them to cover in a course. It suggests that course designers in distance education tend to construct overly-ambitious curricula, especially for beginning students (Chambers, 1992).

4. Teaching Narrative: articulation of structure through plot

Once the teaching enterprise is underway, attention shifts to the problem of *sustaining a strand of meaning* within the text while students' grasp of the new frame-of-reference is still rather tenuous. In order to sustain a strand of meaning we need to pay attention to the *relationships* between the major points made in teaching texts, and between sections of text or stages of argument, along the way towards some satisfactory *resolution* of the issues. An approach to course design that requires identification of discrete items to be learned, which are presented incrementally, tends to focus the teacher's attention on providing a clear, accessible account of each item in turn. It rarely takes account of the fact that if students have an insecure grasp of the framework of assumptions and debates operating within the discourse -- if they do not know who is arguing with whom and what is at stake -- then they will not understand why they are being presented with these particular issues, in this particular order. In that case, the issues may well appear to them precisely as unconnected items, of which there can be no resolution: they are unable to follow a strand of meaning within which the issues acquire significance, and they cannot make the text make sense.

Providing some account of the relationships between such items requires a notion such as 'story' or, more properly, 'plot'. Plot is that element of narrative which provides causal links between episodes, reveals significances, and reaches a planned conclusion. A plot may be simple or complex -- consisting of a single story, with a beginning, middle and end, or two or more stories which interact as plot and sub-plot(s). It may be tightly or loosely structured -- having every detail contribute to the whole, or having some episodes not fully integrated. In any event, there is a conceptual difference between 'the story' and 'ways of telling it', though the two are of course related. Similarly, there is a conceptual difference between 'what is to be taught' and 'ways of teaching it'. This perception invites us to take a more creative approach to our teaching: at least it suggests that the so-called 'logical' structure of a subject may not be the only way to teach it.

Greater use could be made of narrative as a principle for designing Humanities distance teaching material. It is a literary form in its own right, and it is the basis of much writing in the Humanities. For example, it plays a major role in historical writing and hence in the historical dimension of all Humanities disciplines. There are also certain pedagogical advantages in using narrative as an organising principle: it is a familiar form to students, and it can be used

artfully to arouse and sustain the reader's interest. Time sequence may be broken by 'flashback' to events that precede the narrative, or by glimpses of the future. Narrative expectation may be built up and then, surprisingly, reversed. More to the point in this context, passages of *analysis* and *argumentation* may be contained within a narrative framework such that, through techniques of signposting the direction in which argument is heading, and of frequent summary, relationships between parts of the text and the whole may more readily be perceived and kept in mind at every stage.

The text we looked at earlier, extracts of which are contained in the Appendix, is a case in point. Here the author begins by setting up a "story (about) the ways each of us gets drawn into playing various parts within the overall social process". The ensuing narrative incorporates argumentation, passages of analysis, diagrams, photographs, and a television programme. Plot devices include reader participation (through a number of exercises), signposting of direction by means of frequent, descriptive sub-headings, and links between episodes (short summaries of the main points made in each sub-section before the next stage is begun). All of this leads to a resolution, presented discursively as well as in chart form. The concluding section begins, "Let me try now to draw together the main threads of the discussion. What, in the end, have the four theories we have examined told us about ourselves, about our relationship with society and about society itself?"

A focus on narrative also foregrounds the issue of *voice* in the teaching text. Novel-readers read as if they are being addressed personally: meaning is made in the interaction between text and reader. As we saw, distance teachers may engage a similarly heterogeneous readership, beginning by building on what most people share or take for granted. But they are unlikely to do so if they adopt an excessively distant tone, or construct readers in ways they find offensive (for example, with respect to their gender, ethnic origin, religious allegiance, social class and so forth). Such a focus reminds us that teaching texts also function as models for students' own writing.

5. Processes of reading, speaking and writing

A view of undergraduate education in the Humanities as induction into academic discourses has the advantage of giving primary place to development of *discursive processes* themselves. It requires greater than usual emphasis on teaching students to *read* different kinds of text appropriately, and to *speak* and *write* confidently within the terms of the discourse. Moreover, on this view these central processes are to be understood as immanent, not just as means to ends. Learning to read, speak and write within these terms is learning the Humanities. These processes should not be seen as study 'skills' which may be taught and learned separately, irrespective of subject matter.

Here, we may only sketch out the territory and make a few preliminary remarks about these processes.

Reading Often, beginning students are unaware that there are different ways of reading text, since their experience may be confined to novel and other

recreational reading, or reading to acquire certain sorts of information (in newspapers, manuals, and so forth). And often, teachers just assume that because students can read they will be able to read whatever is put before them. We have already seen how difficult it is for students to make sense of books and articles which employ a full-fledged academic discourse, speaking from within a framework of assumptions with which they are unfamiliar.

However, in the Humanities, the objects of study are themselves texts, of many different kinds, which gives rise to particular problems. For example, a student who habitually reads novels may well set off through a dense, philosophical text at a spanking pace, and then assume that they are not clever enough to study philosophy because they cannot follow it on first reading. (Chambers, 1993) The novel-reader also has to learn that a different reading style is required when studying a novel. Historical texts have to interrogated, not read for their surface meanings. And few students are accustomed to close 'reading' of visual and aural texts.

Beginning students need detailed guidance as they approach these tasks. Genre distinctions need to made explicitly, and guided-reading exercises should be offered whenever a new text-genre is encountered. In the context of distance education, such exercises may be conducted very effectively, and quite cheaply, by means of audio-tape used in conjunction with text. (Durbridge, 1987)

Speaking Similarly, Humanities educators usually pay less attention to students' ability to speak within the terms of the discourse than to their ability to write well (except perhaps for philosophers). Within distance education it is particularly difficult to offer students sufficient practice in this form of communication, in which understanding is negotiated and shared. Use of broadcast media, or video and audio-cassette, are invaluable when face-to-face meetings are impossible. In this case, students may at least listen to expert speakers providing a 'model' of the discourse as spoken.

When groups of students may occasionally meet, in seminar or tutorial settings, the time should be used as productively as possible. Focussed-reading exercises undertaken in advance of the meeting, in which students are asked to think about particular questions or issues arising out of their work, will help to ensure that they are well prepared for the topic of discussion. Exercises such as this also make the encounter easier for those people who find it difficult to expose their thoughts and ideas to scrutiny in public. Beginning a seminar session by breaking up the larger group into less intimidating clusters of two or three, and allowing these students to compare their ideas for a short period prior to plenary discussion, also often ensures wider participation at the later stage. It also results in a more clearly-focussed discussion. This leaves the teacher free to concentrate on its main purpose -- to bring students' ideas closer to the concerns and terms of the academic discourse by keeping the framework for dialogue in place, and channelling the discussion along fruitful lines.

In the process, attention should be paid to the 'communicative virtues' of tolerance, patience, respect for differences, willingness to listen and to admit that one might be mistaken, and self-restraint, so that others may speak. (Burbules and Rice, 1991)

Writing For many students, learning to write within the conventions of an academic discourse is the most difficult and time-consuming of these processes. It is particularly difficult because, in the absence of negotiation and discussion with others, the writer may completely miss the mark. Also, students have to take great care to say exactly what they mean to say in writing, since what they write may be re-read and analysed, assessed and graded. Their learning may be accelerated, and their anxiety reduced, if we attempt to lower the stakes; asking students to write frequently, even quite briefly, right from the start of a course, rather than to submit only a few major assignments at seminal points.

Like the other processes, writing should be taught rather than 'picked up'. In particular, students need to be taught how to plan and prepare an essay-answer, structure a coherent argument, use evidence in support of it, and express themselves in appropriately formal language. This does not involve aping the authorial stance or tone of voice encountered in secondary texts, paraphrasing and plagiarising them in the attempt to sound 'academic'. Rather, it means students must take on the task of using what they read, analyse and discuss to make their own interpretations and judgements, and formulate their own views, which they learn to give voice to in writing, appropriately and persuasively.

Teachers may assist in this difficult task in a number of ways. First, by recognising it as difficult and, if possible, offering students the opportunity to discuss essay topics and preparation among themselves. Second, by offering practical help and advice, at seminar meetings and/or in-text -- including making sample essays available to students and discussing the criteria that are used to assess them. Third, by setting straight-forward essay titles which are closely related to the course material the students study: setting very difficult or cryptic questions simply encourages an instrumental approach to the task. Fourth, by using the marking of students' assignments as an opportunity for teaching, not just assessing; entering into the kind of dialogue that will help students build on their strengths and improve their writing at each attempt.

6. Meta-discourse

As we have seen, if students are to become engaged in a discourse as participants they must understand its nature and underlying purposes, and the values inherent in it. That is, from an early stage they must understand what it is they are doing, and why, while they are doing it. As before, this requires that teachers address such issues explicitly rather than expecting students to pick up some understanding of them along the way. Accordingly, teachers should aim to set up and sustain a *meta-discourse* alongside their teaching of subject matter; keeping before students their teaching aims, purposes and assumptions, starting

points and future directions. They should talk directly to students about such matters as fruitful study habits and practices, and the importance of the communicative virtues, as well as exactly what is required of them at every stage, and the criteria that are used to assess their work.

It is helpful if such teaching is undertaken in the context of students' study of specific course material and in relation to particular tasks they are about to do. It may be accomplished in text and through other media (especially exercises and discussion on audio-tape), though, as we have seen, well run tutorial or seminar meetings may stimulate discussion of these issues, and reflection on them, as well as providing opportunities for practice.

7. Course Evaluation

On this view, judgements concerning the *value* and *effectiveness* of a course of study replace the notion of 'verification by objective empirical investigation' (with its connotations of truth and correctness). In distance education, evaluation may well involve empirical investigation -- through questionnaire studies, for example. But it may also involve illuminative strategies such as participant-observation, interviewing students, examining their study diaries, and so forth. 'Evaluation' entails the existence of certain *standards* against which performance may be judged: in the context of undergraduate education such standards are inherent in academic disciplines themselves (though the case may be different in vocational and professional domains).

A course of study may be judged according to how successfully it teaches students what it set out to teach them. This implies that evaluators are familiar with the subject matter in question and are aware of the standards that apply. They must use their knowledge, and their critical faculties, when designing evaluative exercises and when making judgements about how well the standards have been met. In the process they may discover all sorts of other things -- that the course was not what students expected, or wanted, or that what it set out to teach was inadequate in some respect. The latter is a value judgement, which it is also the evaluator's business to raise.

It is clear that evaluation is not an objective process. But this does not make it second-best, something we should apologise for. Rather, it is in the nature of things: the Humanities are concerned with interpretation and judgement at every level. However, this does not mean that they are purely subjective. Earlier discussion -- about rules governing the construction of text-genres and processes of textual analysis, for example, and the methods used to reach informed and warranted conclusions within the different disciplines -- reveals this as a serious misconception. So it is when applied, dismissively, to 'non-scientific' processes of course evaluation.

Conclusion: 'education as introduction to academic discourses'

So, in the end, what does this proposition amount to? First, applying theories of discourse to processes of teaching and learning does not entail entirely new practices. Such an approach certainly draws attention to some stages and aspects of course design: study context and starting points; and discursive and meta-discursive processes themselves, for example. But, in the main, it is an aid to understanding and *re-conceptualising* existing practices, by adding a linguistic and cultural dimension to our perception of them which complements the, currently dominant, perspective from psychology.

For instance, we have seen how course design may be guided, and content selected, by deriving course aims from the overarching concerns of Humanities education; how posing key questions may provide specific structures, offering writers a sense of purpose and direction within the parts that make up the course; how a teaching narrative may be launched which takes account of study contexts, and a plot developed which articulates those structures; how intermediate discourses may be constructed as staging posts towards mastery; how students may be engaged in learning to read, speak and write within the terms of the discourse; and how such courses may be evaluated. In the process, we have developed a complete *system* for course design; an approach which is based on different principles to those derived from psychology.

This approach is in principle *inclusive*: any teaching method or medium which has the potential to help students enter into the new discourse is of value. And, by insisting on such engagement, it pre-supposes that students are *active* learners and meaning-makers. It focuses on students' *understanding* of both subject matter and process. In so doing, such an approach enables us to side-step the issue of 'learner-centredness' *versus* 'subject-centredness' (and, in particular, the rather unproductive 'hurrah/boo' turn the debate tends to take). Clearly, the approach is both student- *and* subject-centred: we start from where the students are and, by building on their current understandings and everyday discourse, equip them to participate in full-fledged academic discourses.

The pay-off for students is that they acquire powerful analytical ways of making sense of our culture, and may speak on equal terms with those who have power and status within it. Correspondingly, teachers are allotted the strong, positive role of inducting students into these discourses, in ways that enable them to do so.

Appendix

Extracts from A. Northedge (1986) Conforming to the Social Order. Open University Social Science Foundation Course, Unit 19

1. The passage begins with a brief discussion about social conformity and processes of early socialisation, including:

> This block is concerned with how society holds together. One part of that story is to do with the ways each of us gets drawn into playing various parts within the overall social process... it cannot be that our actions are entirely our own independent creations, or society would not work.... the years of childhood are often taken to represent the most influential period of social shaping. People talk of their 'roots' as important, even when their adult lives have taken them far from their early social surroundings.

2. The author then prepares to set an exercise, as follows:

> In this unit I shall be discussing some social science theories about the processes of childhood socialisation,...However I realise that as you read about these theories you will probably be comparing them with ideas of your own. Having been through a lifetime of socialisation yourself, I would be surprised if you did not have views on what has influenced you and how... To help us bring your existing ideas about socialisation to the fore – in particular your ideas about child rearing – I would like you to spend a few moments on the exercise below. I shall be returning to it at various points later in the unit.
>
> **Exercise**
> I would like you, in your imagination, to cast yourself in the role of the parent of two small children - say a girl of four and a boy of two. You frequently take them to the local park to play in the children's playground. They are always excited to go and mostly play with happy absorption while they are there. But, every time you begin trying to draw the visit to and end, one or both of them flies into a rage. What is your *reaction* to this? What do you think is the explanation for such outbursts? And what do you think you should *do* about them?
>
> Jot down your answers to each of these questions before reading on. Then see whether you can identify with any of the following approaches, which might pass through a parent's mind.
>
> a) These tantrums are basically just a bad habit. I need to encourage good behaviour to take the place of the bad behaviour. I will give them ice-creams the first time we leave with a little less fuss. Then I'll back that up with treats on every subsequent occasion when there is an improvement.
>
> b) The two children get so involved in the games they play that they feel outraged when I cut across the flow of action. I shall have to explain to them, once again, why we have to go home sometime, and point out that all the other children go home sometime too. Then perhaps I could sing a 'going home' song with them and try to get them interested in some game or other as we go, like not walking on the cracks in the pavement, or I-spy.
>
> c) These outbursts are all part of learning that desires can run into conflict with what people in authority require. The children will eventually have to learn to control their desires, so I must be firm. But at the same time I must be loving, so that they don't become anxious about the confrontation. That way they will learn to respect authority and to accept its values.

d) These two are trying to force me to back down by creating a 'scene', to make me feel bad about spoiling their game. Well, I won't play the role they are trying to thrust at me - as an apologetic, cajoling spoil-sport. I'll change the scene and be a fearsome parent who has been far too indulgent with a pair of spoiled brats (I'll threaten to withdraw various privileges in the immediate future). When they have shown willing to play the subdued and chastened child for a few minutes then I'll relax and play friendly again.

3. The author goes on to discuss each of the options, a-d, in turn. He explains that they are the positions (and explanations) that might be given in these circumstances within four different psychological discourses, namely:
a) behavioural psychology (as represented by Skinner)
b) cognitive theory (Bruner)
c) psycho analytic theory (Freud)
d) social psychology (Goffman's concept of 'role-play').

In the process of introducing each new discourse, appropriate terms and concepts and are introduced, discussed, elaborated and recapitulated.

4. Finally, tables are used as a summary of the ground covered in the unit, of which this is one.

Table 1

	Skinner	Bruner	Freud	Goffman
Model of human	Our *behaviour* tells all. It consists of responses to stimuli. Rewards produce 'automatic' learning	The *intellect* consists of structures of ideas which enable us to represent the world internally and so organize our actions	*Id: ego: super-ego* The ego struggles to channel libido into socially acceptable action while super ego judges	We are *actors* who take on social meaning in local situations, in institutions and from society at large
What is conformity?	Patterns of response, well moulded to fit environments	Sharing the same system of communication and view of the world as others	Tamed desires and a moral conscience	Taking on and playing out roles within social situations
Society's mechanism of control	It *rewards* required responses; i.e. the environment *selects* behaviour which fits	It supplies *cultural* 'tools' - especially language	Its *rules* repress and rechannel and the love/hate of *parents* produces super-ego	*Scenarios, roles* and *scripts* - enable interaction but also contain it

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